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A Whopping Inventory Task - Burger King's purchasing agency lures suppliers online to streamline its huge distribution system (spotlight).

Stephanie Stahl
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It takes a whopper of a supply channel to keep Burger King Corp.'s restaurants well-stocked. The nationwide fast-food chain annually moves some 80 million cases of products, including beef, straws, and napkins.

But managing such a massive supply chain manually has become too complex. Burger King now encourages suppliers to use an electronic network to exchange information on supply and distribution. The Miami restaurant chain's purchasing agency, Restaurant Services Inc. (RSI) in Coral Gables, Fla., has launched RSI/Link to collect sales, shipment, pricing, and inventory information from Burger King's 350 suppliers and distributors.

The Bad Old Days

Previously, these business partners communicated via telephone calls, fax, diskettes, and paper reports to let RSI know how much of what was being shipped to plants and distribution centers. A data collection team at RSI would then manually key the information into a supply database. "It was cumbersome and difficult to manage," says Larry Roos, director of information systems at RSI. "We're trying to eliminate that and have all information come in electronically."

The foundation of RSI/Link is AT&T's EasyLink network. Suppliers can now send information to RSI via electronic-mail-enabled documents, or, for larger and more sophisticated suppliers, via electronic data interchange (EDI). The electronic information is automatically entered into the RSI/Supply system. "We have one central repository of information for practically anything that goes into a restaurant, all tracked through one system," Roos explains.

RSI, like other companies that manage large inventories, is encouraging suppliers to jump on board. RSI will consider a company's involvement when evaluating a vendor for future business, judging them on how quickly they come online and on the quality of their information.

RSI also is trying to make things easy for suppliers. The company has gateways on the AT&T network that allow data to go through an EDI translator or feed into its Microsoft Mail network. "No hardware investment is necessary," says Roos. "Inexpensive software from AT&T will get you communicating with us." For \$99, users of Windows or DOS-based systems can use the EasyLink software, AT&T says.

"This gets businesses used to the idea of doing business electronically," says Jack Shaw, president of EDI Strategies, a consultancy in Marietta, Ga. "They are helping business partners take the right steps." Eventually, Shaw says, even small businesses will move to EDI for such transactions. Prices are going down and standards are being set, making it easier for companies to justify, he adds.

RSI/Link also makes it possible for suppliers to communicate, via E-mail, directly with purchasing managers. Says Roos, "This is valuable because it will make all communications flow more freely."

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2/9/6 (Item 6 from file: 9)
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Burger King Orders AT&T Mail Service
(Restaurant Services will use AT&T EasyLink's e-mail service to connect
more than 350 suppliers and distributors)
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By JOHN RENDLEMAN

CORAL GABLES, FLA. The purchasing cooperative for Burger King Corp. has announced it has turned to AT&T EasyLink's electronic mail service to connect more than 350 suppliers and distributors.

Restaurant Services Inc., based here, last month said it has started using the AT&T mail service to collect sales, shipment, pricing and inventory data from its vendors and distributors and to better manage inventory.
The dollar value for the 3-year contract was not released.

Big Buyer

The purchasing unit buys more than \$2 billion in products annually for the chain's 6,000 U.S. restaurants and ships more than 80 million cases of goods a year, said Larry Roos, MIS director at Restaurant Services.

"We need to have access to all the sales and shipments that are moving through the system," Roos said. "All of this information will flow from the supplier and distributors over the AT&T network into the RSI supply database."

The E-mail network will replace a manual, paper-based tracking and ordering system, Roo said. Restaurant Services does not have a target date for when all its suppliers will be on the network, but is aggressively adding them on a daily basis.

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